

Message Text

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15
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 CAB-02

COME-00 DOTE-00 EB-07 CIEP-01 FAA-00 MCT-01 L-03 /066 W
----- 013307

R 161012Z SEP 76
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7700
INFO AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMCONSUL LAHORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 9726

ROME FOR FAA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, CIVAIR, IN, PK
SUBJECT: INDIAN AIRLINES HIJACKING-VIEW
FROM ISLAMABAD

REF: LAHORE 1165

1. HIJACKING OF INDIAN AIRLINES PLANE WAS HANDLED
WITH GREAT CARE AND DELICACY BY GOP WHICH FULLY
REALIZED INCIDENT'S POTENTIAL FOR DISRUPTING FRAGILE
NORMALIZATION IN PAK/INDIAN RELATIONS. HAYAT MEHDI,
MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL (SOUTH ASIA) TOLD EMOFF THAT
WHEN MFA FIRST HEARD NEWS ABOUT HIJACKING, ITS
IMMEDIATE FEAR WAS A REPETITION OF 1971 GANGA INCIDENT
WHEN INDIAN AIRLINES PLANE WAS HIJACKED TO PAKISTAN, THEREBY
PRECIPITING INDIAN WITHDRAWAL OF PAK OVERFLIGHT
PRIVILEGES AND DETERIORATION IN PAK/INDIAN RELATIONS.

2. MEHDI SAID GOP WAS STILL QUESTIONING HIJACKERS AND
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CONSEQUENTLY MFA PREFERRED NOT TO DISCUSS THEIR MOTIVES

UNTIL INTERROGATIONS COMPLETED. HE SAID MFA WILL SHARE ITS CONCLUSIONS WITH EMBASSY WHEN INVESTIGATION COMPLETED, HOPEFULLY "WITHIN A FEW DAYS." MEHDI DID AGREE PAK TIMES STORY ON HIJACKING (REFTEL) IS GENERALLY ACCURATE. HIJACKERS ASKED TO SPEAK WITH BHUTTO, BUT REQUEST WAS DENIED.

3. ADDITIONAL FOREIGN SECRETARY SHAHNAWAZ, WHO LED NEGOTIATIONS ON PAK SIDE, HAS TOLD RESIDENT REUTERS CORRESPONDENT THAT DURING HIJACK LEADER'S HARANGUE TO THE PASSENGERS WHILE IN AIRPORT KTERMINAL, HE WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF MRS. GANDHI, THE EMERGENCY, THE LACK OF DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS IN INDIA, AND INDIA'S KASHMIR POLICY. SHAHNAWAZ WOULD NOT SAY, HOWEVER, WHAT, IF ANY, SPECIFIC DEMANDS HIJACKERS MADE.

4. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS ALL SIX HIJACKERS FROM KASHMIR, ALTHOUGH TWO WERE PATHANS WHO MOVED TO KASHMIR WHEN YOUNG. ALSO, ONLY LEADER OF GROUP AND PERHAPS ONE OTHER WERE POLITICAL ACTIVISTS; REMAINDER WERE MERELY FOLLOWERS.

5. INDIAN EMBASSY HERE HAS BEEN VERY COMPLIMENTARY OF GOP EFFORTS. COUNSELOR DAYAL-WHO WAS IN LAHORE WITH HIS AMBASSADOR THROUGHOUT THE INCIDENT-SAYS GOP AND PUNJAB PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS WERE HELPFUL AND CONSIDERATE. HE ADDED INDIAN EMBASSY BELIEVES GOP HANDLED A DIFFICULT SITUATION WITH TACT AND PATIENCE. DAYAL CONTENTED INDIAN EMBASSY HAS NOT BEEN INFORMED WHAT SPECIFIC DEMANDS HIJACKERS MIGHT HAVE MADE. HE ADDED BOTH GOP AND GOI HAVE REASONS TO BE EXCEPTIONALLY DISCREET AND CAREFUL ON HOW INCIDENT WAS AND WILL BE HANDLED. HE DID VOLUNTEER INFORMATION THAT GOI HAS NOT YET "FORMALLY" REQUESTED EXTRADITION OF HIJACKERS, BUT IMPLIED THIS HAD BEEN INFORMALLY DISCUSSED WITH GOP.

6. GOP UNDOUBTEDLY BREATHED SIGH OF RELIEF WHEN HIJACKERS SURRENDERED AND PASSENGERS RELEASED UNHARMED. GOVERNMENT HANDLED INCIDENT WELL AND DISRUPTION OF COURSE OF NORMALIZATION WAS AVERTED. HOWEVER, GOP KNOWS IT IS NOT CONFIDENTIAL

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YET OUT OF THE WOODS. STRICT CONTROL OF PRESS TREATMENT OF INCIDENT AND UNCOMMON RETICENCE IN GOVERNMENT TO DISCUSS THE CASE HAS KEPT KNOWLEDGE OF HIJACKERS' DEMANDS AND IDENTITY TO A CLOSE CIRCLE. (WE CONSEQUENTLY DOUBT MFA WILL COMPLETELY SHARE THEIR FINDINGS WITH US.)

7. GOP STILL FACES DIFFICULT QUESTION OF WHAT TO DO WITH THE HIJACKERS. IMPACT ON ANY PAKISTAN GOVERNMENT

WHICH TURNS ANTI-INDIAN DISSIDENTS OVER TO INDIA FOR TRIAL WILL BE HIGHLY NEGATIVE AND RISKS OF DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TO SUCH A MOVE WOULD MAKE IT POLITICALLY UNACCEPTABLE. ON OTHER HAND, IF PAKISTAN KEEPS THE HIJACKERS IT MUST DECIDE WHAT KIND OF PUNISHMENT TO METE OUT THAT WILL MEET INDIAN CONCERNS THAT JUSTICE BE DONE WHILE AT SAME TIME NOT EMBARRASSING GOP. ISLAMABAD WOULD OBVIOUSLY PREFER THAT ISSUE FADE AWAY AND HIJACKERS AND THEIR FATE BE FORGOTTEN. WHETHER THIS IS POSSIBLE DEPENDS IN LARGE PART ON LINE DELHI WILL TAKE AND WHETHER INDIANS INSIST THAT HIJACKERS BE RETURNED TO DELHI FOR TRIAL.
BYROADE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AIRCRAFT HIJACKING, TERRORISTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ISLAMA09726
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760350-0799
From: ISLAMABAD
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760954/aaaabufh.tel
Line Count: 128
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 LAHORE 1165
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 31 AUG 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: WITHDRAWN <05 MAY 2004 by izenbei0, 3.4.X6>; RELEASED <31 AUG 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <01 SEP 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDIAN AIRLINES HIJACKING-VIEW FROM ISLAMABAD
TAGS: PFOR, EAIR, IN, PK, INDIAN AIRLINES
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006